Slow Christmas Mail Delivery Seen

By Jack Anderson

At the best of times, Christmas mail service is anything but a joy to the world. The prospect this season is that Christmas deliveries will be slower than ever.

Postmaster General Elmer Kassen has taken a Scrooge-like attitude toward the postal establishment, cutting back services and blaming the mail jam upon the American Postal Workers Union. He complained recently about parcels damaged by careless handling and mail handlers who didn't handle mail. He had even seen, he grumped, a postal truck driver servicing a defunct railway spur.

Equally unfestive, union president Francis Filby wrote Klassen a private letter saying his charges were "far-fetched" and an "effort on your part to denigrate the rank and file employees. . . ."

While these two titans raged on high, down in the mail rooms attrition from the hiring freeze last March has postmen and clerks bristling with anger and fatigue. Personnel problems, involuntary retirements and transfers are rife.

Some 670,000 workers are now handling mail formerly delivered by 740,000. Another 180,000 are eligible for layoffs, many of these for involuntary retirement. Ten thousand postal employees have been transferred out of rural and suburban post offices in the last 18 months to the mammoth mail centers.

Already, many urban postmen are working mandatory overtime of three hours a day and some must work a seven-day week. The work force is being "bolstered" by 90-day "casuals" who often are more interested in snitching the fudge from Christmas packages than in defying snow, sleet and cold drizzles.

Meanwhile, third-class Christmas advertising, better known as junk mail, is gumming up the system. It accounts for 23.6 per cent of the volume but brings in only 15 per cent of the revenue.

Every time congressional economizers try to jack up the rates, the junk mail lobby starts playing Santa Claus to the House and Senate postal committees. A former committee member ex-Sen. Daniel Brewster (D-Md.), has just been convicted of accepting bribes from a mail-order house to oppose higher junk-mail rates. So the rates remain low, and the mails become more clogged.

Indeed, some junk mailers pressure local post offices into giving the junk mail immediate delivery right along with first-class mail, especially when the junk mail advertises sales on a specific day.

In such cases, mailmen must arrive at the post office at 6 a.m., and sort out the junk mail until noon before they begin their routes. Once on the route, the postman must deliver the junk mail to every house—unlike first class mail which may miss some houses—thus further delaying Christmas deliveries.

All this adds new emphasis to the seasonal suggestion that people mail their Christmas cards and parcels early.

Another ITT Case

A $700 million ITT mutual fund refuses to tell prospective buyers and its 366,000 investors about its problems despite charges by a Ralph Nader group that this silence violates the law.

So worried is the ITT-Hamilton fund about the disclosures of its legal problems, that it has refused even to make public all the reasons why it remains silent.

Securities and Exchange Commission rules require mutual funds to tell all to prospective buyers. This lets customers decide whether they want to risk their savings with the fund. But the SEC has shown a strange reluctance to enforce its own disclosure rules with the politically powerful ITT.

We discovered the ITT-Hamilton omissions by posing as a prospective buyer. The prospectus the company sent us fails completely to mention ITT-Hamilton's recent one-day suspension from trading by the National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD.)

Nor did the ITT-Hamilton prospectus tell us that a federal district court has enjoined ITT from violation SEC regulations. Among other things, the SEC has charged that ITT failed to register certain stocks.

Finally, the ITT-Hamilton brochure told us nothing about a petition filed against ITT by Ralph Nader associate Reuben Robertson. The filing demands that ITT divest itself of the Hamilton funds and make public its legal problems.

At the Securities and Exchange Commission, deputy enforcement chief Stanley Sporkin said the SEC is actively considering the ITT disclosure question. ITT-Hamilton President Frank Peirson told us the NASD violations occurred more than two years ago and contended that none of the three legal cases we mentioned were relevant to the prospectus or required by SEC rules.

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